

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 14, 2016

Agenda Item: Clear Creek Addition to Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

Background

FWP proposes to add about 760 acres to the Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area, southeast of Helmville. The parcels are currently owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and were included in TNC's acquisition of Plum Creek Real Estate Investment Trust lands as part of the Blackfoot Community Project several years ago. The addition of these parcels to the existing 740-acre WMA would protect deer and elk wintering habitat, contribute to large-scale wildlife connectivity between the Garnet Range and Helena National Forest, and establish a shared boundary with USFS lands, improving recreational access between the public lands.

The appraised value of these parcels is \$750,000, of which FWP would pay 75 percent (\$562,500) using a grant from the U.S. Forest Service Forest Legacy Program and the remaining 25 percent would be donated by TNC as match for the grant. The Fish & Wildlife Commission endorsed this project in 2008 and was updated in October 2014 after the Forest Legacy grant was awarded to FWP.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP released a draft environmental assessment for public review on Nov. 12 and accepted public comment through Dec. 11. A public meeting was held Nov. 19 in Helmville, where three members of the public participated. In total, FWP received 21 comments involving 18 people and 3 hunter/angler groups. Nineteen comments were in support of the acquisition and 1 was in support contingent on changes to elk hunting season regulations. One individual was opposed to the purchase and recommended keeping the land in private ownership. The Decision Notice includes a summary of comments.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposed alternative is to acquire the addition. The only other viable alternative would be to forego this acquisition. The parcel would be held by TNC until a buyer was identified; however, the land would not be managed as part of the Nevada Lake WMA and public access would not be guaranteed.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Based on public comment and overwhelming support for the proposed alternative, FWP recommends that the Commission approve the purchase of this addition to the Nevada Lake WMA. The property has high wildlife habitat and recreation values and is strategic to other lands where FWP retains interest.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the purchase of this addition to Nevada Lake WMA.